

Literacy Engagements of Filipino Families in the time of COVID-19

Camilla J. Vizconde

University of Santo Tomas
Philippines

Abstract

Despite the challenging conditions set by the COVID-19 pandemic, families needed to continue literacy activities, usually in more restricted contexts. Filipino families have shown varied experiences, as detailed in their activities in YouTube videos. This study investigates Filipino families' literacy activities during the pandemic. Context analysis was conducted of the discourse analysis of the families' literacy activities from video transcripts gathered from 184 YouTube videos. The context analysis revealed three themes: (a) family as a resource, (b) a refuge, and (c) a re-resolution of the 3Rs of the family. For literacy activities, the family became the source of materials and experiences, relying on materials that the adults usually acquire from schools, modules, and the internet for online classes. The family also conducted activities that helped families cope with the challenges, providing a haven for undertakings through the conduct of religious activities or physical/mental exercises and also serving as a key to unlocking many learning challenges brought about by the pandemic. Lastly, families also provide solutions to challenges mounted by literacy development at home. The literacy experiences drew insights into how the family remains an excellent source for literacy learning, especially for children.

Keywords: homeschooling, family activities, and literacy in the pandemic

Introduction

Family literacy is a concept that has been explored in many Western contexts but has only recently been introduced into the Philippine context. In England the founding of formal literacy viewed early childhood as separated from adult education but in the early 1980's two fields merged (Doyle, 2012). In Canada, it has been reported that family literacy programs have emerged from needs identified by local communities, and these needs have been financially addressed by the government and private institutions (Doyle, 2012).

In a monograph released in 2002 by Padak, Sapin, and Baycich, the family literacy programs in the United States generally have four major components: a) adult basic education for adult family members to improve their basic skills, obtain their General Educational Development certificates (GEDs) and learn skills for the workplace, b) early childhood education is for the children to learn skills to help them achieve in school, c) parent education, where adult family members discuss parenting practices, nutrition, the importance of literacy experiences for their children, and other topics important to the family members together in literacy activities that the families can also do

at home, and d) parent and child together time (PACT) for the adults and the children to participate (p. 12). The result of this study demonstrated the influence of adults in the home upon children's development as readers and writers and the influence of federal programs for "thinking about homes and schools, about parents, children, teachers, and literacy learning (p.8)".

Family literacy emphasizes the intergenerational transfer of language and literacy from parents to their children or from generation to generation (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Education (UNESCO) Institute for Lifelong Learning, 2008). UNESCO has consistently conducted studies worldwide on family literacy, generating reports from Africa, North and Latin America, the Arab States, Asia and Pacific, and Europe. Initial studies in Asia included only New Zealand and Vanuatu; only recently was the Philippines in a survey of Family Literacy, Indigenous Learning, and Sustainable Development (UEA UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation Family Literacy Team, 2021). The Philippine report found three key findings: a) adult education is critical to developing intergenerational values, goals, and aspirations; b) women take pivotal roles both within families and the wider community; and c) lifelong learning opportunities in communities strengthen and preserve local and indigenous knowledge; sustain people's livelihoods; and create links between the family and the larger community (p.53).

The studies establish connections between the literacy development of children and adults, considering this connection a factor in establishing better literacy programs. These situations, however, were found to be available in the old normal and the pre-COVID-19 pandemic. The recent COVID-19 pandemic added a different dimension to the connections, resulting in other home and school setups following the health protocols defined by the COVID-19 pandemic. Families worldwide have had to adapt to a setup that would isolate them physically from other families, including other community institutions. Still, they connected to various media for many other purposes, including learning and getting information.

This study provides insights into the experiences of Filipino families and their literacy development during COVID-19. It aims to answer the question: What are the experiences of Filipino families in terms of their literacy development during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Literacy Landscape in the Philippines

The Philippines has struggled with the issue of literacy, especially with its recent performance in Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) conducted in 2019 and the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2018. These assessments reported that a typical Filipino 4th grader scored 297 in mathematics and 249 in science, which is below the benchmark score (400). In addition, the PISA results supported these findings when it reported that the average 15-year-old Filipino scored 353 in mathematics and 357 in science, almost reaching the bottom of the list. Aggravating this dismal performance is the reading score of 340, a score translated to students not obtaining minimum proficiency score.

In the recent survey of the Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) by the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) in 2019, it was reported that 96.4% of Filipinos (10-64

years old) were functionally literate while those ages 15-19 had the highest introductory literacy rate at 98.6 percent. These reports do not capture the challenges many students face, as observed in their performance in global assessments. As countered by Albert (2021), the evaluation of FLEMMS may be problematic, and the increase in the out-of-school youth, especially during the pandemic, and the effects of the pandemic itself on students would likely decrease the essential and functional literacy of the students.

Challenges in the reading of Filipino learners from the elementary grades were identified by Tomas, Villaros, and Galman (2021) as originating from non-mastery of the elements of reading, the presence of learners at risk, and lack of reading culture. The majority of the students were found to be at the frustration level. The study identified suggested for improvement in reading scores the parents-as- partners in developing the reading culture but did not provide any information on how to implement. The suggested reading program focused on school activities, usually teacher-initiated, like informal checking, monitoring of students, weekly read-aloud activities, and provision of supplementary reading materials. The report did not include the school and home partnership despite the mention of reading culture as very important.

Family Literacy Programs

Family literacy, as defined by Ponzetti and Bodine (1993), "encompasses a wide variety of programs that involve the involvement of both parents and their children in literacy-enhancing practices and activities" (p. 106). Its main goal is "to improve the literacy of educationally disadvantaged parents and children, based on the assumption that parents are the child's first and most influential teachers (Hibpshman, 1989; McDonald, 1989)" (Ponzetti & Bodine, 1993, p.106). This definition is widely accepted in the United States and the United Kingdom where family literacy programs emerge strongly, clearly supporting formal literacy programs.

One of the very first models for family literacy programs in the United States and was known as the Kennan Model after William Kennan, Charitable Trust in Northern Carolina. As Darling and Hayes (1989) noted, the model brings parents and their children (usually 4-year-olds) three times a week to the school, where various literacy activities beyond the classroom are prepared for the participants. These families were considered "at risk"; thus, the program aimed at developing their employability while developing their children's learning. The model was effective for families with illiterate or undereducated parents.

Another family literacy program recognized in the United States is the Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY). In an analysis by Doyle (2012) of studies by Baker, Piotrkowski, & Brooks-Gunn (1998), that the program was "equivocal" (p. 95). In a study of families with preschoolers enrolled in schools and grouped in cohorts, gains were observed in one cohort but not in the other. The following year, preschoolers who were not attending school were grouped into two cohorts, and the result yielded that one cohort performed better than the other. The two studies could not explain the characteristics or factors that contributed to the performance of the better cohort. "It was suggested that in future studies of HIPPY, greater scrutiny of the variations in the delivery of programming to parents and the degree of parent uptake and implementation at home may explain variations in child outcomes" (p. 95).

Homework remains prevalent family literacy practice as indicated by Fox (2016). In her interviews with families in North Carolina, USA, she found homework to be interpreted and used in varied ways: homework as a connection for intergenerational literacy, homework as a source of pride, homework to initiate teacher feedback, homework as academic enhancement, homework as a collective rather than independent practice, homework as quality time, homework as a routine and homework to communicate the curriculum. The study identified homework as a family activity, where mothers (usually) older siblings, and younger siblings participate and work together. Mothers were acknowledged to have active roles in this family literacy activity while fathers were not identified at all in the course of the study.

Clarke and Comber (2020) agree that homework shapes the family literacy practices but does not necessarily equal to better family activities. Homework that focused on additional time for working parents to help their child in accomplishing tasks including reading and writing added to the anxiety of parents. "This extra layering of educational work means that students' academic performance is more and more contingent on what the home situation and family educational capital allows, creating an even greater disparity for families with less resources in terms of time and cultural capital" (Clarke & Comber, 2020, p. 527). Lynch (2021) supported the findings of Clarke and Comber (2020) on homework being additional burden for some parents especially for those in the USA who are non-native speakers of English, speaking particularly Haitian and Spanish.

Despite some unsettled results in some of the studies in the US, family literacy continued to be implemented with more positive outcomes (Kim & Byington, 2016; Haneman, 2017; Soliman, 2018; Fikrat-Wevers et al., 2021). These studies have shown that the involvement of family members in literacy development, especially for preschoolers, promotes language and literacy engagement at home. Furthermore, the studies indicated that parents can stimulate children's literacy skills at home.

In the United Kingdom, the Basic Skills Agency (BSA) was the first to establish family literacy programs in 1994. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (2008) discovered that the programs have boosted the literacies of the parents and children and while enhancing the parents' abilities to help their children. These programs have been efficiently evaluated every two years, and the evaluation has helped develop innovations in the program.

A study on home literacy and numeracy in Asian countries yielded results that identified factors not observed in Western contexts. Cheung et al. (2021) found that "home environments across different contexts in Asia comprise a certain degree of heterogeneity in parental beliefs, home practices, associations between the home learning environment and child outcomes, and effectiveness of parent training programs" (p. 14) and these impact on the implementation of home literacy activities have been conducted. Very interesting, too, were findings that non-parental family members like grandparents and siblings help promote learning activities at home. Unsurprisingly, mothers in Asia have more robust engagement in learning activities than fathers. This finding is supported by earlier studies by Gadsen (2002) who identified mothers as primary

care and sole givers in families. Furthermore, the review identified three significant issues commonly observed in Asia but are absent in Western contexts:

- Focused on academic achievement and parents' responsibility to help children learn at home while identifying "play" as being lazy;
- Acknowledged non-parental family members, which included siblings and grandparents which can extend to domestic helpers who help foster learning at home; and,
- Recognized that children learn multiple languages as there is demand for them, and thus they grow up in multilingual contexts.

In a more recent study conducted by the University East Anglia UNESCO Chair in Adult Literacy and Learning for Social Transformation Family Literacy Team (2021), ethnographic insights on family literacy from Ethiopia, Malawi, Nepal, and the Philippines were determined. : These insights include using more informal learning; recognizing local and indigenous practices; similarities in terms of "literacy provision and dominant approaches to family learning" (Family Literacy, 2021, p. 81); and differences in terms of "histories and diverse livelihood and religious practices" (Family Literacy, 2021, p. 81). Studies suggested a more "embedded and bottom-up approach" (Family Literacy, 2021, p. 81) should be practiced, promoting informal interactions that would strengthen literacy in diverse contexts.

These investigations identify the critical partnership of adults and children in achieving successful literacy development. As informed by Trends in International Mathematics and Science Studies or TIMSS (2018), "Students whose parents often engaged them in literacy and numeracy activities during their early childhood had much higher achievement in fourth grade than students whose parents never or rarely did (p. 14)".

Vlogs

A vlog or video blog is a regular record of thoughts, opinions or experiences that takes the form of a short video and that people put online for other people to watch and comment on (Goedhart, et.al., 2022). It has become a very popular output in social media, and its popularity is not just used for entertainment purposes, as much research has already been conducted about vlogs or vlogging. YouTube (n.d) has stated in its copyright transparency report that more than 500 videos are uploaded every minute. Vlogs have also been a subject of research for fashion (Choi & Lee, 2019), language (Rivas, et.al. 2022), business and economics (Li, et.al, 2023), travel and tourism (He, Xu & Chen, 2022) and education (Brame, 2016). The interest in vlogs for research is continuous as the COVID-19 pandemic has probably heightened this attention as seen in social media. This study intends to look in available YouTube vlogs that show family literacy activities and determine how families navigate themselves in learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method

Design

Following the growing field of big data emanating from available media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and TikTok, the study used YouTube videos published during the COVID-19 pandemic. These data from social media can be called “big data”. “The term big data is commonly used to describe a range of different concepts: from the collection and aggregation of vast amounts of data to a plethora of advanced digital techniques designed to reveal patterns related to human behavior” (Favarreto et al., 2020, p. 1). In the case of YouTube provides numerous types of videos on various content, and many of these videos have transcriptions that can serve as data. The YouTube videos were not elicited from the content creators but were readily available in the public domain.

Qualitative in design, the study used an unobtrusive method. The unobtrusive design allows the research to occur without the participant’s active engagement with the researcher. Citing Webb (1966 & 1981), Lee (2000) attributes the terms 'unobtrusive measures' and 'non-reactive' to Webb et al., referring to “data gathered by means that do not involve direct elicitation of information from research subjects” (p. 1) and the sense that “they are presumed to avoid the problems caused by the researcher's presence” (p. 1). As YouTube videos are voluntarily uploaded by content creators, the viewing of such content does not require the viewer to interact with the video or the creators and videos uploaded were not elicited by the researcher. In this case, the videos and transcriptions were used purposively as data.

The study made use of thematic analysis, which Braun and Clarke (2006) define as a method for “identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data” (p. 6). In identifying patterns, it is essential that the analysis does not just emerge from the data sought but should also include the researcher's data analysis. Furthermore, “Analysis involves a constant moving back and forth between the entire data set, the coded extracts of data that you are analyzing, and the analysis of the data that you produce” (Braun & Clark, 2006, p.15).

Data Collection and Procedure

Data were collected from YouTube. Concurrent with the growing educational interest in YouTube is the emergence of YouTube scholarship in peer-reviewed journals and conference proceedings (Snelson, 2011, p. 160). In a bibliometric study, Mostafa, Feizollah, and Anuar (2023) found studies in Scopus on YouTube that have spanned over 15 years. Initial topics focused on gaming and video sharing, and eventually, the trending topics led to misinformation and COVID-19.

Initially, keywords such as family learning, family videos, family activities, family literacy activities, and activities of the family were used to search for the videos. However, these keywords did not yield videos, eventually identifying two key phrases: family activities and homeschooling. One hundred forty-nine videos on homeschooling and 29 videos for family activities were downloaded and analyzed from YouTube. Initially, there were more than 200 videos considered for the study. Still, after careful consideration, the inclusion criteria for the videos included the following: a) should be published between March 2020 and December 2022, the period of the COVID-19 pandemic and the period where data need to be delivered in the research study; b)

should have English transcriptions; c) should include family interactions about teaching, learning or sharing of information; and d) should show Filipino families.

Mode of Analysis

Using MaxQDA as a tool for analysis for this study, several steps were taken to identify the themes. As indicated on its website (maxqda.com), the steps which were adopted by Braun and Clarke (2006) are:

- 1) familiarizing one's self with the data;
- 2) generating initial codes;
- 3) searching for themes;
- 4) reviewing potential themes;
- 5) define and name themes; and
- 6) produce the report.

Since the videos' transcriptions were already available, the analysis focused on existing texts. Another feature available using the MaxQDA is the formation of the "word cloud," also utilized in the study.

Findings

In the initial identification of videos, terms on YouTube, such as family literacy, family learning, or literacy activities of families during COVID-19, yielded little footage. Literacy engagements, however, were found in videos when key terms like homeschooling and family activities were keyed in. Generally, family activities include homeschooling and videos showing literacy engagements were culled from these videos.

The narratives on family literacy with homeschooling (n=156) and family activities (n=26) during the COVID-19 pandemic from the YouTube transcriptions were used as data. Using selected vlogs gathered from YouTube, it focuses on the various activities and challenges of the individuals and their families and their experiences in learning to read and write. The thematic analysis using MaxQDA revealed the following codes and their respective percentages of coded transcript interview segments. Specifically, descriptive and in-vivo coding were utilized.

In terms of family literacy activities, a third (30.77%) still consists of homeschooling activities for the children, followed by doing religious activities (i.e., online masses) (26.92%), and celebrating events and holidays (23.08%). Meanwhile, homeschooling videos are primarily focused on answering learning activities (27.52%), mathematics (22.82%), and science topics (18.79%).

As seen in Table 1 (top 10 activities), family activities of parents who are homeschooling their children, especially in subjects like mathematics and science, hold literacy activities such as drawing, reading, and writing. Learning activities hold the highest percentage.

Table 1

Literacy engagements found in homeschooling activities

	Documents	Percentage	Valid Percentage
Doing learning activities	41	27.52	28.67
Mathematics	34	22.82	23.78
Science	28	18.79	19.58
Reading stories	20	13.42	13.99
Drawing and coloring	19	12.75	13.29
Language and handwriting	14	9.40	9.79
Answering modules	11	7.38	7.69
Doing personal activities	11	7.38	7.69
Having rest	6	4.03	4.20

Figure 1
Word Cloud on Homeschooling Videos



As seen in Figure 1, the word cloud shows "our" as the outstanding word. This big word indicates the family members' ownership regarding their activities at home. Some identified activity words were read, applause, see, think, touch, color, and call. These words are calls to action. Usually, the

adult instructs the children, and the children follow the directions. Literacy key words like read, color, sounds, think, touch, book, story, and rhyme may also be found in the word cloud. These words are found to be mentioned several times in the conversations in the vlogs which could indicate literacy activities that families engage with.

Figure 2
Word Cloud on family activity videos



Some words in Figure 1 are also found in Figure 2, the word cloud on family activity. Other outstanding words in Figure 2 are listen, look, show, write, and applause. The similarity indicates that the ongoing activities focused on the children's learning activities, mainly on a formal learning environment, more than the informal ones. The words that also stood out in this figure are the house, home, and family, which suggest that family members often mention these words and could have them as priorities. Activities found in this family literacy applause, answer, touch, turn, got, call, look, find, make, and start; meanwhile, data on family activities, including having family meals, doing household chores, and observing religious activities (e.g., praying and attending service), are more scattered across the vlogs. As indicated in Table 2, the activities of families vary.

Table 2
Family activities

	Documents	Percentage	Valid Percentage
Homeschooling	8	30.77	32.00
Online worship services	7	26.92	28.00
Holidays	6	23.08	24.00

Doing homework	4	15.38	16.00
Cleaning	3	11.54	12.00
Home decoration	3	11.54	12.00
Parental responsibilities	3	11.54	12.00
Online business	2	7.69	8.00
Work responsibilities	2	7.69	8.00
Grocery shopping	2	7.69	8.00

Schoolwork, housework, and employment activities with worship activities and holiday activities are the most frequently identified events. Activities at home focused on online activities and household work. Guided by the initial codes from MaxQDA, the review of the potential themes, and defining the final names, the family literacy development yielded three themes: family as a resource, a refuge, and a (re)solution (The 3Rs of the Family).

Discussion

Family literacy developed in this research is based on the definition of UNESCO and anchored on intergenerational learning. In addition, literacy here is not just the development of students or children but also any other household member. Based on the data gathered from YouTube, family literacy can be observed in family engagements and family activities. The activities observed and the transcriptions gathered generated codes that could be grouped into three main themes: family as a literacy resource, family as a literacy refuge, and family as a (re)solution. These three themes emerged based on the activities and dialogs found in the vlogs.

Family as a Literacy Resource

During the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdowns and restrictions were imposed on families, limiting movements to the home environment. The family then becomes the literacy resource for all members of the family. The family members become sources of information and they also help develop the skills, usually reading, writing and mathematics. The skills development was much more evident among those children who were homeschooled. Homeschooling is differentiated from other educational setups as the homeschool provider delivers specific materials and plans. Parents in homeschools are the pseudo-teachers, and they direct the videos that are usually available on YouTube.

More often than not, the mothers remain the driver of schooling engagements.

“fun, okay here is mommy's teacher toolbox so these are mommy's stuff okay;
and these are your Nate the great books and other chapter books wait, wait are;
those names different are you sure those are our names yeah those are Nathan great;
yeah those books okay what's this?
that is okay those are the pictures when we when we were in the time zone correct
we took that in time zone along with this one”

For young kids, the mothers remain to be the primary mover in homeschooling. A series of videos shows how mothers navigate their children's literacy development using various tools like books, art materials, and educational toys. The mother's dynamic role is also evident in family activities where the mothers usually play active duties in the student's engagement with the modules (for those in public schools) and the communication with the teachers. Mothers also identify the materials for reading and the activities for writing. The mothers playing vital roles in learning is supported by Gadsen (2002) on mothers as primary caregivers and Cheung, et.al. (2021) on studies regarding Asian parents.

“Jacob was very much engaged in his lesson and even the new things that I introduced this week, he was enthusiastic about them. Like our morning routine, his math and even his phonics.” (Video 37 on Homeschooling, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gg_5-d7p2k)

Some fathers have shown some instances of teaching their children to read, but these are rare videos. Most videos for young children often show children reading, writing, counting, coloring, and cutting.

Family as a Literacy Refuge

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued, families had to stay home, and the house with families became a refuge. Refuge as a theme is defined as a place where the family members feel protected and safe, similar to a haven. As a refuge, the family provides the learning environment and activities that would help the family members cope and re-energize to face challenges or stress.

"Sometimes you can't get anything done during the day. It's most important to take care of your mental health so even when you're not feeling well, we're just gonna go for a walk, get some sunshine and then we're gonna regroup." (Video 12 (Family Activities), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t2yKCYklQvw>)

Another aspect found in the refuge theme is the parents' religious belief, where they draw strength before they begin the learning activities. This theme is located in the experiences of the homeschooling mother, who remembers to pray before the start of the homeschooling activities:

“Okay good morning today is Monday the 15th of August and today we are starting kindergarten two here in our home school but today is also the feast of the assumption of our blessed virgin Mary so it's a very important Marian feast and I thought we'd start this vlog with a prayer for the assumption of Mary” (Video 15 (Homeschool), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dH7fHFuJ874>)

Family as a (Re)Solution

The family as a literacy group is the venue where solutions are available. Adults and children alike find that problems get to be solved in the family. Families encounter issues in their children's

learning. One parent showed how difficult learning at home can be when the parent always needs to assist the child in answering the modules from the school.

“did you let him answer the modules yeah, they answer you know together yeah if you don't know the answer together but for ask for him is it's a lot of stress for them both”
(Video 71, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMJBIUXK8lk>)

The mother spends her time working with her son on the modules as homework, and she continuously prods her son to answer modules in mathematics, science, and English since they need to be submitted within the 3-week period. She finds this very difficult and stressful as her son seems unmotivated and easily distracted if she does not stay with him. Another mother stated that sometimes they get the videos and tasks later, which poses difficulties for them in terms of submission. Furthermore, she acknowledges that internet connectivity is another challenge they must address. These challenges on homework were also identified by Clark and Comber (2020) and Lynch (2021).

"We have just downloaded all the videos just now. We need to download them before we can watch them because if we watch them online, the internet is slow, so the videos are lagging, and we need to have a better way of watching them." (Video 84 (Homeschool) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CTxse1OwNK0>)

Family members like this mother serve as support to many of their children during the pandemic. They find ways to solve problems. They help resolve challenges in answering modules, solving mathematics problems, reading stories, motivating children to write and finish their activities, and solving connectivity problems by using various gadgets. The literacy activities, though formal as these are required by schools, have been accomplished through the help of family members for the young graders. In vlogs where students are in high school, the learners show how they can independently answer their modules, attend online classes, and write their assignments as required in their studies. These students also create their vlogs and can share their learning activities which indicate that they are less dependent on family support.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has created a different literacy environment for many Filipino families. Based on videos gathered, families have become literacy resources, literacy refuge and literacy solutions. These themes, which emerged from the YouTube videos, have described the experiences of Filipino families in the continuing quest for literacy. Very notable, however, are the following:

- The literacy experiences are usually focused on children. There is always the assumption that children need to draw on adults for their "learning" and are always "reliant" on the knowledge and skills to be shared by the adult.

- The adults' literacy experiences should be emphasized or identified in most of the videos gathered. As prime caregivers and literacy movers, the adults did not provide any reflection on how they had learned from the literacy activities.
- The mother tackles the role of the teacher at home. Whether the context is homeschooling or family activities, mothers usually initiate the literacy activities and constantly ensure that activities are accomplished to comply with school requirements.
- Literacy experiences are almost always connected with formal schooling. Many literacy activities show reading and writing in different subjects as required by the school or in connection with the prescribed curriculum. As viewed in the videos, family activities have yet to show significant reflections or insights on literacy.

Future studies could consider expanding the data to other social media forms, especially vlogs, with more family activities.

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